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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
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USAID/ANE/MEA
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, December 27, focuses on reports about the earthquake and resulting tsunami that caused deaths and destruction throughout

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Asia. Other stories highlight domestic issues as well as reports about the Palestinian elections.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The secrets of the buried Arab development report"

Columnist Bater Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (12/27): "Thirty Arab researchers and intellectuals, who wrote the third annual Arab human development report for 2004 - which was stopped through American blackmail, are currently meeting in Beirut to discuss the possibility of publishing the report through an organization independent of the United Nations. No doubt, stopping the publication of the report constitutes a huge scandal for the United States. The report editor, Nader Farjani had scored big and destroyed completely all of the false claims made by the U.S. administration with regard to reform in the Arab world when he took his case to the international media and exposed the American conspiracy.. This American conduct stirred a great deal of resentment among commentators and intellectuals in the west, including Thomas Friedman.. But for the genuine free and liberal Arab intellectuals, who have not sold themselves to the Pentagon, this issue marks the beginning of a successful intellectual battle against both the United States and backwardness in the Arab world for the first time ever in a clear manner and without fear of being accused of treason."

-- "The required Syrian scapegoat"

Columnist Haidar Rashid writes on the op-ed page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (12/27): "There has to be a scapegoat to carry the blame for the security collapse in Iraq. After, the battle in Fallujah and the exhaustion of Zarqawi and his group of foreign terrorists as the scapegoats in Iraq, there is an urgent need to find a new scapegoat on which to pin all these defeats. Prior to the American invasion and occupation, the honor fell to international terrorists and chemical weapons. After that came the fighters from outside Iraq, Zarqawi and others. Now, as some pro-American Iraqis are saying, there are attempts to involve Syria and its intelligence services in what is going on in Iraq.. Syria has no interest in being directly involved in what is going on in Iraq, despite the fact that its interests do not coincide with the presence of the American forces and the continuation of the occupation. A direct involvement on its part, however, would make it a target and would increase America's motivation to attack it.. A new scapegoat is required in order to explain the Iraqi-American failure of imposing security and taming the Iraqi people. The need for such a scapegoat increases as the elections draw near. Yet, this issue is one thing and choosing Syria as the new scapegoat is another. Events on the ground suggest that such a choice will not be acceptable and the Americanized people in Iraq must begin looking for another scapegoat."

-- "The disciplinary London conference"

Lamis Andoni writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (12/27): "Do not misunderstand: America and Israel are refusing to take part in the London conference next month, but they do support the meeting itself if its purpose is to 'rehabilitate the Palestinian Authority'. In other words, now that the leader Yaser Arafat, the 'major obstacle in the path

to peace', is gone, Washington and Tel Aviv are seeking to snip the wings of the Palestinian regime as a precondition for resuming negotiations.. It is known that America and Israel had pressured London to cancel the conference if the imprisoned Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti did not withdraw his nomination for the presidential elections.

Democratizing the Palestinian regime would start with the nomination of the acceptable candidate, namely Mahmoud Abbas, whose stances, I'm sure, would not be respected if he did not succumb to Israeli and American demands. No wonder then that Washington and Tel Aviv would support the London conference with specific definitions and tasks that would guarantee Abbas' abidance by positions and policies that otherwise would not go through if it was left up to the Palestinian people. Halting the Intifada and placing the security apparatus under a unified leadership is not designed to put an end to security violations but to stop them from taking part in resisting the Israeli occupation. In this context, the London conference aims to 'tame the Palestinian regime'."

HALE